Sunday, May 2, 2004

1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Wilmington House Tour 2004

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room

Presented by:

The Friends of the
Wilmington Memorial Library

Welcome!

The Friends of the Wilmington Memorial Library welcome you to our second House Tour. Today you will have the opportunity to visit seven different residential locations. As before, the homes represent a range of architectural styles and eras, from Victorian to modern. The Masonic Hall, also known as the Hiller Laboratory, at 32 Church Street, will serve as our Hospitality Center.

An event like this does not happen without community support and the generous hospitality of the local homeowners who have invited us into their homes. The House Tour Committee must first thank these people - we obviously could not present this program without them!

We would also like to thank the following: The Friendship Lodge of the Wilmington Masons for use of the Masonic Hall as our Hospitality Center; the Neilson family, Gerry O'Reilly, Adele Passmore, Ann Berghaus, Kathleen Black Reynolds, and the Wilmington Historical Commission for sharing their knowledge of Wilmington's history with us; Rapid Reproduction for their always excellent printing services; the sponsors who supported this project by placing ads in our brochure; and library staff who assisted with ticket sales as well as other aspects of the project.

And thank YOU for joining us today on our House Tour. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Enjoy the tour!

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1 *32 Church Street*

The building now known as the Friendship Lodge of the Wilmington Masons will serve as hospitality center for the House Tour from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. on the day of the tour. Refreshments and restrooms will be available. Tickets for the tour may be purchased at the hospitality center on the day of the tour for $25.

Also known as the "Hiller Laboratory," this unusual building, with its bracketed hood, is believed to have been built around 1885 and is shown on a map of Wilmington Center dated 1889. Although the building now has two turrets, pictures from early in the twentieth century indicate that at one time it actually had four. Mrs. Dr. France Hiller is listed as the building's first owner, although the building is generally believed to have been built for her husband, Dr. Henry Hiller.

The Hiller's were a well-known local couple of the late nineteenth century; they were wealthy, eccentric, and active in Wilmington's civic life. Famous for their outrageously expensive

and ornate caskets, they had become wealthy as Boston "doctors" producing a patent medicine which was advertised as "for the restoration of 'manly vigor' and for the cure of certain 'Errors of Youth' not commonly mentioned in drawing rooms." Their "laboratory" on Church Street, only a small part of the real estate they owned in Wilmington, has been called a Bavarian Castle – Henry Hiller was born in Bavaria – yet other experts have said it is an example of the Queen Anne style of Victorian architecture. Some accounts suggest the building was not completed before Dr. Hiller's death; others say that he did, in fact use the building as a laboratory, or maybe even a factory for the manufacture of his "medicine," before his death. A newspaper account from 1935 states that Dr. Hiller intended to establish a museum here for the display of his rare stuffed animals. It is believed that after Dr. Hiller's death at the age of 43 in 1888, his wife used the building to store cranberries harvested from her cranberry bog in what is now Rotary Park.

Regardless of what use the Hiller's had for the building, it has been the property of the Trustees of the Friendship Lodge of the Wilmington Masons since shortly after Mrs. France Hiller's death in 1900.

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2 *7 Stonehedge Drive*

The house at 7 Stonehedge Drive was built in 1996 on land which had been part of the Roberts Estate. The former Roberts home still stands as a private residence on Burlington Avenue, but much of the property that was attached to it, once totaling at least sixty acres of land, has been sold and developed.

This modern colonial style house is made elegant and comfortable with its thoughtful decorating. A spacious foyer opens into an impressive living room which features marble detailing and French doors leading to a well-lit dining room. Off the dining room, a screened porch overlooks the backyard; formerly a deck, the current owners had it enclosed to create comfortable indoor space with a view. The kitchen features a marble topped center island and opens to a cozy breakfast area.

A warm family room near the front of the house completes the first floor.

Upstairs, tastefully decorated bedrooms are on view. But a trip upstairs is not complete without a visit to the "office" with its unique book-inspired wallpaper and Palladium window.

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Friends Book Sale 2004.....

.....will be here before you know it! Stop by the Friends of the Wilmington Memorial Library Book Sale to pick up summer reading materials for yourself, your children, your grandchildren, everybody!

DATES: Thursday, June 17th - FRIENDS NIGHT!
(If you're not a member, join at the door!)
- 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Friday, June 18th and Saturday, June 19st
- 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

As always, we have a wonderful selection of fiction and nonfiction books, as well as children's books, videos, books on tape and games. At prices of 50 cents for paperbacks and one dollar for hardcovers, the Friends Book Sale is hard to beat!

All proceeds benefit the
Wilmington Memorial Library

2004 House Tour Committee

Friends of the Wilmington Memorial Library

Your questions, comments and suggestions are welcome. Please let us know if you would like to help out next year or to offer your home for a future Tour.

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3 *5 Laite Road*

The home at 5 Laite Road, located at the border of Tewksbury and Wilmington, was built around 1910. For many years this cottage was one of a handful of homes on this side of Main Street (now Route 38), in an area of farmland and small dirt roads. Close enough to Main Street to see the streetcars going by, it was also adjacent to Tewksbury's Milligan's Grove, site of an Evangelist Camp Meeting Ground in the early twentieth century. The entire area was part of the Silver Lake district, "....a tight group of neighborhoods, not Wilmington or Tewksbury, but the 'Lake.'" (from page 60 of Gerry O'Reilly's book, Entering Silver Lake) Until around the end of World War II, the "Lake" was somewhat of a resort area, with beaches, camps, restaurants, and crowds of summer revelers to enjoy it all.

In the past nine years the current owners have made major renovations to the house, including the addition of a second floor and a great room.

Upon entering from the farmer's porch, one steps into a small foyer that was a bedroom before the home was renovated. To the right of the front door is the dining room which includes a window where the front door used to be, as well as an original fireplace. Toward the back of the house is a thoroughly modernized kitchen. A wide glassed-in hallway off the kitchen leads to a large great room which runs the length of the house. The addition of this room, which features a fieldstone fireplace, wet bar and large screen television, was the current owner's most recent remodeling project. Upstairs from this room is another large room, the "game room," with a pool table and whimsical décor derived from "The Simpsons" television show.

Access to the second floor bedrooms is via the staircase at the front of the house, near the front door. Three bedrooms can be found upstairs, one of which clearly belongs to a boy with military interests; as part of the room's décor, army vehicles are suspended from the ceiling. A custom made vanity in the master bedroom is another highlight. All in all, this is a wonderful example of imagination turning a small house into a large, modern home.

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The Friends of the Wilmington Memorial Library is a volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to making the Wilmington Library the best it can be. The Friends have provided adult programs, financial support., books to the homebound, holiday decorations, museum passes, technology and much more. Please consider joining the Friends.

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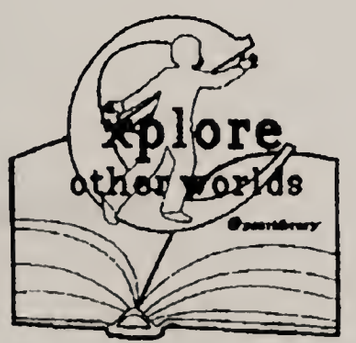

Summer Reading Program
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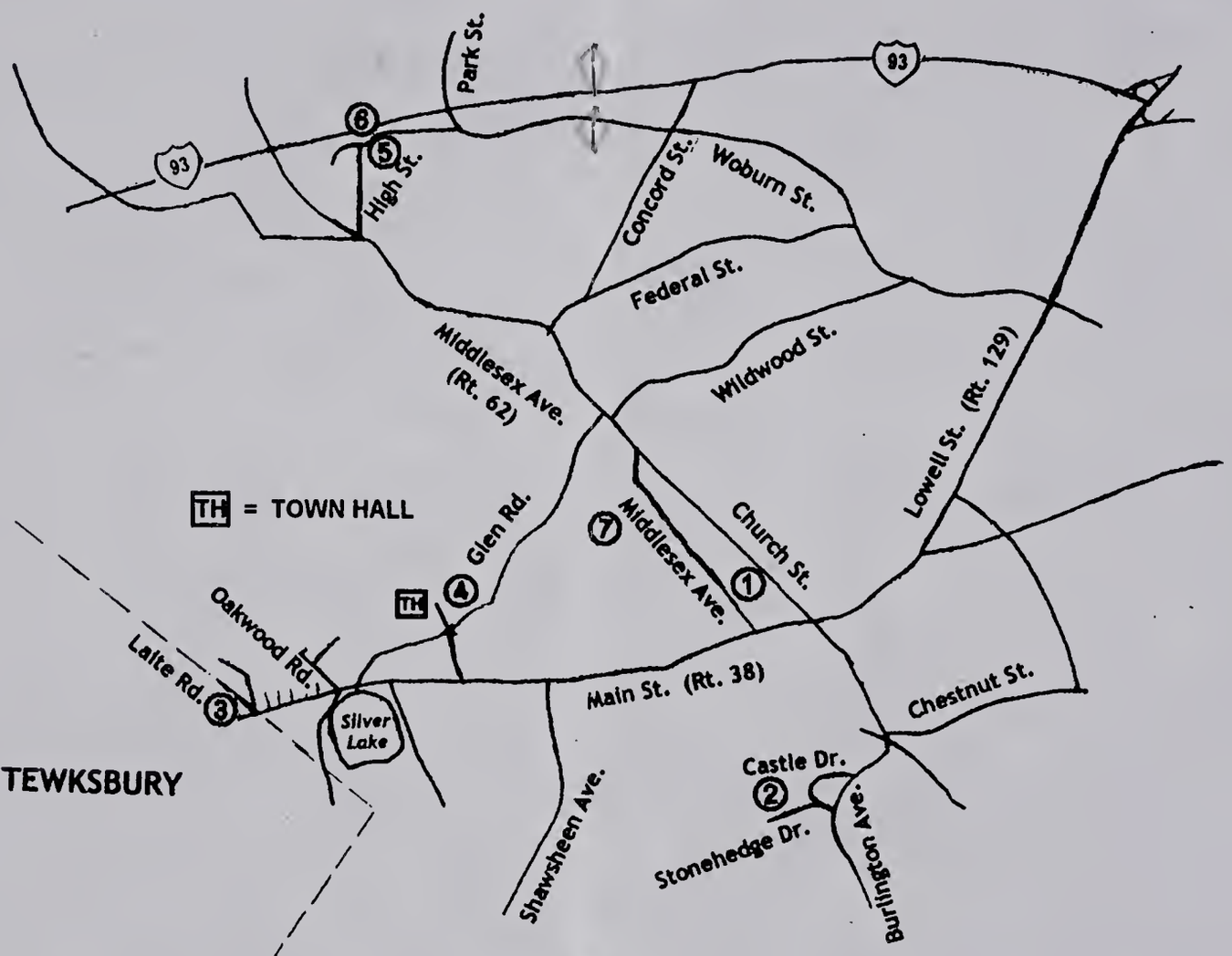
Wilmington House Tour 2004

Sunday, May 2, 2004
1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.



OPEN HOUSES:

1. **32 Church Street: headquarters and refreshments at Friendship Lodge/Masonic Hall**

2. **7 Stonehedge Drive**
3. **5 Laite Road**
4. **117 Glen Road**
5. **67 High Street**
6. **72 High Street**
7. **126 Middlesex Avenue (St. Thomas Rectory/ formerly Bond Estate)**

<u>As a courtesy to homeowners, please:</u>

- **Sticker numbers 1 - 99 start at houses # 2 - 4**
- **Sticker numbers 100 and above start at houses # 5 - 7**
- **No children under the age of 12**
- **No spiked heels**
- **Have your sticker visible at each home**

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4 117 Glen Road

The house at 117 Glen Road was built about 1914 on farm land owned by Christian "Pop" Neilson and his family. This farm property included The Elms, a boarding house at the corner of Harnden Street and Glen Road run by the Neilsons. The Elms was popular with vacationers looking for country air and made even more attractive by its proximity to Silver Lake, a popular vacation spot early in the twentieth century, easily accessible to city folks by streetcar. Eddie Neilson was the son of the owners of The Elms and the home at 117 Glen Road was built for him and his wife Mildred *nee* Buck. Peter Neilson, Eddie's uncle, built the foundation of the house using cement blocks that he made on-site. Eddie and Mildred lived in this house throughout their adult lives. It is believed that as a young boy former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill vacationed in their home one summer. The current owners bought the house from the Neilson family in 1987.

The home has a very cozy, livable feel, with much preserved from the era of the original owners, including a plant conservatory with a metal ceiling and wooden Venetian blinds, much built-in shelving, and maple flooring in the second floor bedrooms. Improvements made by the current owners include adding kitchen counter space, installing new wallpaper throughout, and changing the breakfast room into an office while retaining its original paneling.

Local history buffs will be interested to note that in addition to its ties to the Neilson family, this home contains a relic from the always colorful Hiller family (see description of Masonic Hall). In the living room, located to the left of the front door, is a large, ornate mirror which hangs over the fireplace. This mirror is reputed to have belonged to Mrs. France Hiller, also known as the "casket lady," notorious for her obsession with death, caskets and her appearance. It is believed this is the mirror she used to view herself reclining in her custom made, hand-carved casket.

Kathleen Keady
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21 Middlesex Avenue • Wilmington, MA 01887

5 *67 High Street*

Artist: Gretchen Morse

The home known as the Augustus T. Norton House at 67 High Street is one of 17 houses that comprise the newly created High Street Historic District listed in 2003 on the National Register of Historic Places. Built in 1929 by A.M. Surette, a builder from Reading, in the Neo-Federal style, it replaced the Sidelinker House which Mr. Norton had moved to 47 High Street and which still stands at that location. Previous to that, it is believed that Richard Harnden, one of the town's earliest settlers, built a house on this spot around 1666, a house which probably stood until the 1860's.

Mr. Augustus T. (Gus) Norton and his wife, Winifred, who had both been living "next door" at 57 High Street, moved into the house now at 67 High Street in 1930 and remained there for the rest of their lives. During that time they saw their daughter Elizabeth married in the living room of 67 High Street to

Captain Larz Neilson, who was to become the owner and editor of the Wilmington Town Crier. They also saw their neighborhood change from a quiet country lane to a suburban street running parallel to a major highway (Route 93) in the late 1950's. With the death of Gus Norton in 1970, Larz and Elizabeth Neilson, who had been living in the family's old house at 57 High Street, moved into the house at 67 High Street and the house has been in the Neilson family ever since.

This is a house that feels lived-in and modern, yet retains the dignity and atmosphere of a home of its era, with furnishings that are perfectly suited to the house. A few of the interesting details in the front parlor, or living room, are the picture rail at the top of the wall, the beautiful hardwood floors, a fireplace, an impressive 75 year old piano and a magnificent grandfather clock. Also downstairs is a comfortable den off the living room; a recently remodeled kitchen, which was enlarged but still retains its period feel and much original glass door cabinetry; and a dining room containing Gus Norton's many-leaved dining room table. The second floor with its wood flooring, more picture railing, newly reconfigured and remodeled bathroom and three bedrooms is also comfortable and well furnished, but the "Elvis room" is the most unique. Small and located at the back of the house, for many years the sewing room of Winifred Norton – Winni to her friends - this room is now a home office with a fun and eye catching display of Elvis Presley memorabilia.

6 *72 High Street*

The house at 72 High Street has been identified by the Wilmington Historical Commission as a structure dating back to the late nineteenth century and as such it has been listed as part of the High Street Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. While most older homes experience a great deal of change over the years, this one is part of a select group of Wilmington homes that were physically moved in the late 1950's to make room for the construction of Interstate 93.

It is hard for those who were not here to imagine the destruction and disruption the coming of Route 93 caused in Wilmington. Some homes were moved, others were destroyed. Roads were rerouted and neighbors who had been within an easy walk of each other were suddenly separated by a multilane highway. Local newspaper accounts in the late summer and early fall of 1958 frequently mentioned "whumps" that could be

heard all over town as construction crews dynamited their way north on the new highway's projected path

Today, 72 High Street is a charming, well maintained home situated on a parcel of land which still feels surprisingly bucolic. Although High Street runs in front of the house and Route 93 is behind and beside it, the lot is pie shaped and the house is placed so that a beautiful yard with tall pine trees stretches far back behind it. The current owners have maintained the feel of a small country farmhouse while adding modern touches that make the house comfortable. The house features a family room – added by the current owners - which overlooks the yard; a recently updated kitchen with beamed ceiling, a wonderful basket collection and a dining nook; a bathroom off the kitchen; a small guest room/office which contains an antique bed; a formal dining room; a living room which was enlarged by the removal of the entry hall; and two bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. Adjacent to the house (and not part of the tour) stands what was a two story barn that is now used as a garage and workshop.

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7 *126 Middlesex Avenue*

The Thomas Bond Estate is a Victorian Italianate house built in 1854 for Thomas Bond and his family. The Bonds were very prominent in Wilmington during much of the nineteenth century. In fact, the son of Thomas Bond was Arthur T. Bond who created Wilmington's town seal and amassed an impressive collection of historical memorabilia. Until 1864, when a fire destroyed most of its "bake houses," the Bond's owned and managed the Bond Cracker Company which was located less than a mile north of the estate on Middlesex Avenue. Although the Cracker Company never rebuilt in Wilmington after the fire – in fact, it moved to Boston where it continued to operate for approximately another 100 years – the Bond family remained in Wilmington and played an active part in town affairs till at least the end of the nineteenth century.

This stately building is now the rectory for St. Thomas of Villanova church and has been church property since early in the

twentieth century. As rectory it contains living quarters and office space for the parish priest(s) of St. Thomas. The first floor of this three story building will be open to visitors on the tour. It consists of two offices, a living room, a dining room and a kitchen. Although much of the original Victorian detailing of the house has been altered over the years, it still contains some interesting features: the crown molding, floor to ceiling windows and marble fireplace of the front office hint at the former grandeur of the house, as does another marble fireplace and antique chandelier found in the dining room. The front living room contains wood paneling and hardwood parquet floors that would be very costly to duplicate today and a large brick fireplace in the kitchen suggests a time when fireplaces were functional and not merely decorative.

Joyce K. Brisbois

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